

Civil Rights and Reactive Countermobilization

Why did southern whites resist the civil rights movement? In retrospect, it might seem that ferocious opposition was preordained given that racial division and white dominance had long been defining features of southern politics.¹ Crucial differences among white southerners fade away in the popular historical imagination as all are cast as a uniform mass of intemperate racists supporting flamboyant, fire-breathing politicians, brutal sheriffs, and shadowy extremist organizations. Such caricatures, however, are unsatisfactory if we wish to account for the outcomes of the civil rights movement.² In contrast to the portrait of strident and cohesive opposition, some argue that the southern white countermobilization to civil rights was actually weaker and declined sooner than what might have been expected. It should be remembered as well that organized segregationists calling for massive resistance against civil rights mobilization and federal intervention into southern racial politics often bemoaned the unwillingness of their white brethren to rally in defense of Jim Crow. I therefore suggest that an explanation for the triumphs of the civil rights movement begins with an account of white resistance and countermobilization. Obviously, an analysis of reactive countermobilization highlights how much opposition the civil rights movement had to overcome while, at the same time, reveals considerable weaknesses in the southern defenses of Jim Crow institutions.

This chapter begins with the proposition that the same costs that motivate targets to respond to movement demands in particular ways likewise

¹ Key (1949).

² Chappell (1994); Lewis (2006); Sokol (2006).

define how third parties behave. Thus, instead of treating the activities of antagonistic third parties as exogenous, the theoretical approach presented here offers an encompassing explanation for their behavior. As such, this approach suggests certain consistent patterns should be evident. From this perspective, organized opposition is neither automatic nor universal; instead, resisters have the most compelling interests to engage in sustained countermobilization.³ Such actors combined two defining characteristics: the vulnerability of their interests to civil rights gains and insulation from the disruption costs associated with movement activities. Although conformers (those largely lacking exposure to either cost) are assumed to prefer others to rally in defense of the status quo, some of these actors may opt to participate in organized opposition. Also in an erratic fashion, vacillators too may support countermobilization in hopes of smashing the movement that is interfering with their interests. I predict, then, that the memberships of organizations such as the Citizens' Council, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and other smaller white supremacist organizations represented no random cross-section of southern society; instead, resisters can be expected to disproportionately populate their ranks.

Next, I confirm these patterns of vulnerability and responsiveness based on a survey of studies of southern racial politics. Consistent with my predictions, these accounts point to civil rights countermobilization as drawn overwhelmingly from three distinct segments of southern society: plantation interests, elected officials representing localities in which African-Americans constituted a large plurality or outright majority of the population (the so-called "black belt"), and vulnerable white workers.⁴ Before mechanization, planters engaged in labor-intensive agriculture and their allies depended upon keeping labor costs down. Jim Crow institutions made this possible; indeed the southern racial order was constructed in no small measure to maintain precisely these labor patterns.⁵ The entrance of African-American voters into the electorate threatened those elected officials with large yet disfranchised black constituencies, a commonplace circumstance in plantation districts. Too, white workers exposed to greater competition with African-Americans for scarce

³ Zald and Useem (1987).

⁴ Originally a reference to the rich soil of the cotton plantation regions, the term "black belt" changed to refer to those sections in which the African-American population was most heavily concentrated. The black belt arcs from eastern Virginia down through the Deep South, across to Louisiana.

⁵ Greenberg (1980); Schwartz (1976); Wright (1986).

resources had advantages to lose if the civil rights movement were successful. Each of these elements potentially regarded civil rights demands as threatening and therefore possessed strong incentives to oppose the movement. At the same time, these interests were generally insulated from the disruption costs from protests that might have induced bargaining and compromise. In addition to those with material interests in racial hierarchy, those whites with the most intense preferences in favor of defending the color line, the most fervent racists, regarded civil rights demands as unduly costly and might be expected to participate in countermobilization based solely on ideological zeal.⁶ Most other southern whites, while opposed to integration, seldom participated in organized opposition and engaged in relatively undemanding forms of support, such as voting for segregationist candidates.

Finally, I discuss how the activities of movement antagonists shape target responses and, ultimately, movement outcome. As E. E. Schattschneider asserted in his classic *The Semisovereign People* (1960), the intervention of bystanders to a fight can determine the outcome of the struggle. So it was with the civil rights movement. In addition to the impact of white countermobilization diminishing movement participation, the organized backlash amplified the concession costs for movement targets and others.⁷ Merchants suffering from protracted sit-ins and tempted to capitulate might be deterred from doing so by credible Klan threats of reprisal, or southern white moderates might hesitate to support racial integration out of fear of social ostracism and the loss of their livelihoods. In modulating the interactions between movement and targets, segregationist organizations influenced the outcomes of local and national movement struggles and, ultimately, the prospects for movement success. To evaluate these propositions, in this chapter I survey the patterns of white countermobilization and describe their impact upon the civil rights struggle.

⁶ Scientific racists (those who purported to have a scientific basis for their white supremacist views) in academia, for instance, fit this description. These actors, formally positioned as conformers, threw their support behind the racial order due to their ardent ideological preferences. To some extent, certain agitators might be viewed as “racial entrepreneurs” who derived economic benefits from their leadership of racist organizations. Even scientific racists might derive exclusive personal benefits (selective incentives) and notoriety in their own market niche in southern society. For instance, these individuals often spoke before audiences to legitimate Jim Crow institutions, published opinion articles, and so on. The general assumption here is that actors without a clear interest in resisting the civil rights movement nor otherwise rewarded for doing so will constitute a relatively small bloc of organized opponents.

⁷ Terchek (1974).

The Civil Rights Challenge to Southern Racial Inequalities

Accounting for the local patterns of response to civil rights mobilization begins by specifying the disruption and concession costs that the movement produced for southern whites. Disruption costs stemmed from the movement's capabilities to engage in persistent and significant interference with the interests of targets and third parties. To impose these disruption costs, movement activists used a wide array of institutional and unconventional tactics including litigation, lobbying, petitions, voter registration, political campaigns, marches, rallies, direct-action protests (such as sit-ins), economic boycotts, and on rare occasions violent actions, the last often in response to segregationist brutality. Several indicators suggest that the civil rights movement at times possessed the means to generate extensive disruption. The *New York Times*, a standard source for social movement event data, reported nearly thirteen hundred movement-initiated actions across the South from 1955 to 1965.⁸ Estimates for total participation in the movement vary, but many estimates convey high levels of involvement. In contemporaneous interviews of southern African-American college students, 16 percent said that they had taken part in a sit-in during the first year of these protests.⁹ Fully 24 percent indicated that they had participated in the student protest movement in some manner. After two years of sit-ins, an estimated one hundred thousand blacks and whites had actively participated in these activities. Over two hundred thousand spectators cheered at the March 28, 1963, March on Washington. During the surge in mass protests in 1963, the Southern Regional Council (SRC) estimated 930 individual protest demonstrations in 115 cities throughout the South, and more than twenty thousand arrests. In addition to these scattered campaigns, movement elements launched major sustained community-wide protests in Albany (1961–1962), Birmingham (1963), and Selma (1965). The many economic boycotts against downtown merchants, which were often effective at depressing profits, depended on the broader support of the black community. And, despite intimidation and violent repression by state authorities and private citizens, the movement demonstrated a fierce tenacity. With the escalation in protest activities and heightened media attention, the combined annual income of the top civil rights organizations rose sharply to total over

⁸ McAdam (1982, 152). The South here does not include the Border South, but only the eleven states of the former Confederacy.

⁹ Matthews and Prothro (1966, 412).

five million dollars in 1965.¹⁰ Against vulnerable interests, coordinated community-wide protests and boycotts produced sizeable and durable disruptions. Although all too rare from the perspective of civil rights supporters, Justice Department lawsuits, court orders, and direct federal coercion at times added to the movement's capacities to impose costs upon intransigent public officials and private citizens.

Southern whites differed in their exposure to the disruptions that the movement generated. Local commerce, in particular, might be reduced with the onset of coordinated agitation. Lunch counters were blocked and downtown retail purchases plummeted. Too, segregationist violence against civil rights proponents drove customers away and tarnished the images of localities eager to attract external investment. The tumult that accompanied the 1957 integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in which President Eisenhower called in soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division to restore order, brought a sudden halt to that city's success in attracting new industry. At the same time, the movement's electoral leverage in southern politics was sorely limited. The localities in which African-Americans were most heavily concentrated were also those that discriminated the most aggressively in voter registration. In national politics, the migration of African-American voters to northern states that were crucial in presidential elections made office-seekers hesitant to invite their disaffection, at least until the latter 1960s. The disruptive capabilities of the civil rights movement, then, interfered more with certain economic interests and the political aspirations of national office-seekers than with black belt elected officials. Too, insofar as the movement successfully enlisted support of the national government, federal intervention vastly augmented the movement's disruptive capabilities.

Along with these disruption costs, the demands of the civil rights movement defined a constellation of concession costs for their targets and third parties. Despite the division of the movement into a few main organizations, as well as differences in tactics and demands, the disparate elements that constituted the civil rights movement focused during the years of peak activism on three principal goals: the desegregation of southern public schools, the integration of other public accommodations, and political inclusion (in particular, equitable voter registration).¹¹ Transformative

¹⁰ McAdam (1982, 253).

¹¹ The "big four" organizations were the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Congress of Racial Equality

as they may have been for the pattern of racial interactions in the South, they threatened no fundamental redistribution of resources for the vast majority of southern whites. Although whites overwhelmingly preferred segregation, few whites actually derived tangible material benefits from the color line. If African-Americans went to white schools, the schools continued to educate all of the children. Black access to lunch counters or restaurants made a minimal difference in the availability of service for whites. In other words, civil rights demands were not zero-sum such that African-American gains amounted to equivalent white losses. Yet, to suggest that few whites gained material benefits from Jim Crow is not to suggest that none did. Certain actors did derive considerable benefit from white political dominance and economic disadvantage, and thus had a far greater interest in resisting the civil rights movement. And resist they did.

The Political Economy of the Plantation South

It is a fundamental axiom of southern politics that the most strident defense of the color line historically came from whites living alongside a greater concentration of African-Americans. As V. O. Key (1949) observed in his magisterial *Southern Politics*: “The hard core of the political South – and the backbone of southern political unity – is made up of those counties and sections of the southern states in which Negroes constitute a substantial proportion of the population.”¹² From secessionist sentiment to Dixiecrat support in the 1948 presidential election, southern black belt counties were the foundation of southern political unity and the most tenaciously committed to white supremacy. As suggested above, this proposition rests upon the convergence of three overlapping but distinct interests. Specifically, civil rights threatened the economic imperatives of labor-intensive plantation agriculture. Although often overlooked,

(CORE). Some campaigns included other demands as well, including the desegregation of government-run public facilities, such as swimming pools or golf courses; equal employment opportunities; and the provision of public goods (including paved streets, lighting, enhanced fire protection services, and so on). In practice, the main civil rights organizations developed a division of labor, with the venerable NAACP often concentrating upon litigation to integrate public schools and accommodations, and to some extent voter registration. Church organizations, often affiliated with SCLC, participated in marches, protests, and boycotts to integrate public accommodations and promote voter registration. SNCC and other student organizations embraced direct action protests to bring about the integration of public accommodations and voter registration.

¹² 1949, 5; Heard (1952); Heer (1959).

embedded in Key's analysis was a keen appreciation for the economic interests in opposition to racial egalitarianism. The localities with large black populations crucially were also those in which "large-scale plantation or multiple-unit agriculture" prevailed.¹³ The importance of maintaining a cheap, docile, and immobile labor force for plantation agriculture united these elites around the preservation of white supremacy. Elements of Key's analysis resonate with studies of democratic transitions from authoritarianism. These studies point to the reactionary impulses of agricultural elites engaged in labor-intensive production.¹⁴

Not only did the civil rights movement challenge an ensemble of economic interests tied to plantation agriculture, black enfranchisement represented a political threat to the electoral fortunes of black belt public officials as well.¹⁵ The magnitude of the threat increased with the relative size of the potential African-American electorate. In those localities in which African-Americans made up an outright majority or a significant plurality, and had been barred from political participation, their sudden entrance into a political order premised on this exclusion represented a tremendous political threat. In Sunflower County, Mississippi, the birthplace of the Citizens' Council, African-Americans made up nearly 70 percent of the population, but only a handful were eligible to vote.¹⁶ As the sheriff of Terrell County, Georgia, told a reporter: "I tell you, cap'n, we're a little fed up with this registration business. . . . We want our colored people to go on living like they have for the last hundred years."¹⁷

Finally, at the most general level, aggregate white preferences in favor of racial segregation were often strongest in localities with large black populations.¹⁸ Among less-educated whites, larger African-American population represented a greater competitive threat for various resources, particularly employment opportunities. Along with their economic interests, public opinion data suggest that black belt whites harbored the most negative beliefs about African-Americans and were strongly opposed to the prospect of racial integration. While hostile opinion might not be

¹³ Key (1949, 5).

¹⁴ Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992).

¹⁵ Although this chapter primarily addresses the conduct of third parties, the movement at times directly targeted black belt officials. As argued in the previous chapter, this analysis predicts the same behavior for both targets and third parties with the same cost configuration.

¹⁶ McMillen 1971.

¹⁷ *New York Times*, October 25, 1964.

¹⁸ Heer 1959; Black 1976.

sufficient to elicit active countermovement participation, these intransigent whites often provided crucial electoral support for the most ardent segregationists. Collectively, this convergence of interests constitutes the foundation of Key's argument that the black belt whites cohered on racial matters – a hypothesis that has been the central analytical device for countless studies of southern racial politics.¹⁹

At the same time, southern planters, their allies, and black belt officials were insulated from movement disruption costs. Although many civil rights advocates believed that the southern racial order was vulnerable at the ballot box, absent white defection or supportive federal action to transform the structure of local political rewards, marches to city hall to demand evenhanded voter registration represented no real electoral threat to white officeholders. For African-Americans residing in the plantation belt, economic dependence upon whites made them especially vulnerable to repression. As Harold Fleming of the SRC pointed out: "The livelihood of Negroes in this agricultural area, except for an occasional professional man, has traditionally depended on the good will of white landlords, bankers, merchants and local officials. This economic dependence has always been a major instrument of social control."²⁰ NAACP field reports document numerous cases of Delta sharecroppers and farmers suffering economic reprisals because of their civil rights activities.²¹ To the extent that civil rights organizers sought to unite African-American day laborers under the banner of the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union, their efforts met with crushing failure.²² Coupled with extreme dependence on plantation elites, the reduction in demand for farm labor resulting from agricultural mechanization further discouraged protest and weakened the ability of African-American insurgents to disrupt agricultural interests. Civil rights activities threatened plantation interests in the fifties but, by the time African-Americans were capable of organizing agricultural labor, these workers lacked the bargaining leverage to exact concessions from planters. Instead, they could be casually discarded. The waning of the economic interest in defending labor-repressive agriculture that

¹⁹ For instance, Black and Black (1987); Button (1989); Corzine, Creech, and Corzine (1983); Glaser (1994); Matthews and Prothro (1966).

²⁰ Fleming (1956, 48).

²¹ Field Report from Medgar Evers and Mildred Bond, NAACP Papers, Part 20, Reel 3, Frames 408–11. On the fears of economic or violent reprisals even after the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, see Salamon and Van Evera (1973).

²² Cobb 1994.

accompanied mechanization also lessened the imperatives for elite countermobilization – a point discussed further later in the chapter.

The serious threat that black enfranchisement posed to political targets and the movement's inability to directly impose disruption costs upon the targets' electoral prospects placed these interests decisively against accommodation. Under these circumstances, lingering on the sidelines of this struggle was not a satisfactory option; instead, these political targets had a compelling interest in entering the fray to resist the movement.

As the shock from the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision settled in across the region, it was overwhelmingly the political and economic elites from each state's black belt section that stepped forward to call for "massive resistance."²³ In his classic study, Numan Bartley (1969) found that the rural "neobourbons" – a coalition of labor-intensive producers of cotton and tobacco, their allies in banking and commerce, and local elected officials – provided the decisive impetus for reactionary countermobilization against *Brown*.²⁴ After scattered murmurs in support of rule of law, appeals for moderation were drowned out as the clamor against the decision swelled. The countermobilization of black belt elites manifested in three overlapping ways: they provided electoral support to the office-seekers espousing the most segregationist views, they provided political leadership in the construction of new legal fortifications to defend Jim Crow institutions, and they sought to unite southern whites into an interest organization capable of compelling racial orthodoxy throughout the region.

Rural black belt whites from all classes voted disproportionately for ardent segregationists. Updating Key's analysis for the post-*Brown* period, Earl Black found that counties where higher percentages of the

²³ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* 347 U.S. 483 (1954). The phrase was coined in 1956 by Governor Harry Flood Byrd of Virginia.

²⁴ Next to research on the civil rights movement, scholarship on southern resistance to civil rights gains is surprisingly limited. Bartley's *The Rise of Massive Resistance* (1969) remains a classic as does McMillen's *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction* (1971). Others include Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (1973). There are additional studies concerning specific states and localities, such as Gates, *The Making of Massive Resistance* (1964) on Virginia, or Moya, *Let the People Decide* (2004) on Sunflower County, Mississippi. Recently, however, there has been more attention devoted to southern countermobilization. See Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (2006); Webb, *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (2005). On the broader political dynamic that the *Brown* decision unleashed, see Klarman, *Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Movement* (2006).

population were African-American (greater than 30 percent) offered militant segregationists far more support in gubernatorial elections than counties with lower concentrations. “In the South after 1954 as well as in the pre-*Brown* South that Key analyzed, consistent support for the more outspoken advocates of racial segregation centered demographically in rural counties with large black populations.”²⁵ To the extent that the black belt amounted to a significant share of the total statewide vote, this electoral leverage no doubt pushed the political field toward more extreme positions on racial integration and black enfranchisement.

From state capitols to county courthouses, black belt representatives advocated for the construction of legal barricades against encroachments from the federal courts and NAACP. In the years following the *Brown* decision, southern state legislatures enacted over 450 new laws to protest and evade the ruling with a range of devices from resolutions of defiance and pupil placement plans that limited desegregation to the barest tokenism to the more audacious, including nullification, interposition, and the closure of integrated public schools.²⁶ In many states, these representatives pushed for the formation of legislative committees to propose legal strategies of resistance, investigate “subversives,” and roll back the threat to segregation and white supremacy.²⁷ In South Carolina, L. Marion Gressette, a representative from a cotton county, chaired the first legislative committee devoted specifically to orchestrating state anti-integration activities. In Louisiana, William Rainach, state senator

²⁵ 1973, 76. Black defines a “militant segregationist” as a candidate whose campaign rhetoric fulfils any of three criteria: statements of emphatic support for segregation without a counterbalancing qualifier (such as respect for the federal judiciary), segregation is a major campaign theme, or appeals to racial prejudice are used against political opponents (68). For a more detailed analysis, see also Black (1976).

²⁶ Murphy (1959); Roche (1998). Moye (2004) likewise reports the enactment of “nearly five hundred” such laws. Cook (1964, 133) reports 250 such laws in the first four years after *Brown*.

²⁷ During this struggle for civil rights legislation, southern congressional representatives – active in both the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SISC) – charged that civil rights activists and organizations were Communists and a threat to American democracy. From their southern-controlled bastions in the federal government, the representatives of Dixie waged a propaganda war on integrationists. At the same time, these representatives had close ties to segregationist organizations and to the investigative committees created by most southern state legislatures after *Brown*. In turn, these state investigative committees cited HUAC and SISC hearings and reports to demonstrate the sinister Communist conspiracy lurking behind the struggle for civil rights. For a brief description of these connections, see “Reporter Gets Anti-Civil Rights Info from Segregationists Sources,” *Atlanta Inquirer* (May 30, 1964).

from a cotton parish, led the Joint Legislative Committee to Maintain Segregation. Other leading segregationists came from the same parish, including Louisiana House Representative John S. Garrett, who served as vice chairman of Rainach's Segregation Committee, and William M. Shaw, who acted as the committee's chief legal counsel. Following the onset of widespread sit-in demonstrations and boycotts in 1960 in Virginia, committee chairman State Senator Joseph C. Hutcheson, from the black belt town of Lawrenceville, spearheaded investigations of Virginia chapters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Similarly, governors and congressional representatives whose political bases resided in their state's black belt sections encouraged mobilization against federal encroachment upon "states' rights."

In addition, these legislators fashioned, in many states, new state sovereignty commissions to bolster the defense of Jim Crow. During the peak years of the massive resistance movement against the implementation of *Brown*, the Mississippi legislature created the Sovereignty Commission to oppose federal government "encroachment."²⁸ At the time, Walter Sillers, the speaker of the Mississippi House, called the Commission "the greatest forces [sic] we have in this battle to save the white race from amalgamation, mongrelization, and destruction."²⁹ Often with substantial appropriations, sovereignty commissions churned out a torrent of segregationist propaganda, conducted surveillance, infiltrated civil rights organizations with paid informers, helped local law enforcement identify potential "trouble-makers," and orchestrated various forms of economic intimidation and reprisals against movement participants and supporters. Almost without exception, the instigators and chief organizers for the political defense of white supremacy followed this pattern. In addition to the mobilization within state and local politics, black belt elites sought to extend their reach beyond their plantation strongholds under the auspices of the most formidable interest organization to emerge to defend segregation: the Citizens' Council.

The Citizens' Council

In the months immediately after *Brown*, new Citizens' Council chapters spread rapidly from the cotton plantation counties of the Mississippi

²⁸ *General Laws of the State of Mississippi*, Chapter 365. Similar agencies were established in most other southern states in this period as well; see McMillen (1971).

²⁹ Quoted in Carter (1959, 63). On the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, see Katagiri (2001).

Delta to establish a large membership base. Invoking the motto “States’ rights and racial integrity,” the organization attracted thousands of enthusiastic supporters. Council chapters spread across most Deep South states and into the Peripheral South as well.³⁰ Estimates of the total membership of the many local Council chapters vary widely. According to Neil McMillen, perhaps the most informed source on the southern resistance movement, the combined membership of all southern resistance organizations probably never exceeded three hundred thousand with the Council achieving a peak membership of perhaps two hundred fifty thousand.³¹ Comparable organizations, though not under Council auspices, emerged as well. These included the Virginia Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties, the Tennessee Federation of Constitution Government, and the Georgia States’ Rights Council.³² In April 1956, the leadership of various associations founded the Citizens’ Council of America to form a loose confederation among the various state segregation organizations.

From the start, the Citizens’ Councils core leadership and supporters were overwhelmingly drawn from plantation belt political and economic elites.³³ The Councils’ organizational strength lay in states with the lingering strongholds of plantation agriculture: Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Robert B. Patterson, a principal founder of the White Citizens’ Council in Mississippi, managed a Delta plantation. William J. Simmons, the son of a wealthy planter, organized the Council in Jackson and emerged as a major figure in the Council organization.³⁴ Indeed, six of the fourteen charter members of the first Citizens’ Council, formed in Indianola, Mississippi, were farmers and closely tied to the plantation interests.³⁵ In Alabama, State Senator Engelhardt, “a planter whose feudal domain spread over 6,500 acres of Macon County,” served as executive secretary of the state organization.³⁶ So too did State Senator Givhan of Dallas County, Alabama, who was “widely considered the

³⁰ The Deep South includes Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. The Peripheral South encompasses Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

³¹ McMillen (1971, 153); Routh and Anthony (1957).

³² There are exceptions to this general pattern. Unlike other states, the segregationist Patriots of North Carolina emerged in the Piedmont section of the state.

³³ McMillen (1971). As with black churches and colleges, Council organizers often turned to preexisting civic and fraternal organizations as mobilizing structures for membership recruitment.

³⁴ Muse (1964, 47).

³⁵ Moya (2004, 64–5).

³⁶ Bartley (1969, 88).

spokesman for the State Farm Bureau Federation” – the voice of the state’s planters. U.S. Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi, an ardent Council supporter, owned a large Delta plantation. Farley Smith, a Lynchburg planter and son of Senator “Cotton Ed” Smith, provided leadership in South Carolina.³⁷ In Louisiana, the Council derived core support in “the upland cotton districts along the Arkansas border and the fertile lowlands of the Red River and upper Mississippi River deltas, [where] the Councils formed a solid bloc of twenty-two parishes in the large-plantation area of the state, [and] where Negro concentration was heaviest and resistance to social change greatest.”³⁸ State Farm Bureaus, the principal organization of plantation interests, “overwhelmingly aligned themselves with a vigorous defense of white supremacy.”³⁹ Malcolm Dougherty, the president of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, served in his state’s Council leadership.⁴⁰ Many other examples might be cited. In sum, “the impetus, the organization, the leadership, and the control of this movement rested in the hands of the traditional black-belt ruling class that had emerged after Reconstruction.”⁴¹

In 1954, before the mechanization of the cotton harvest, the civil rights movement continued to be a threat to these interests. As a Council member explained, “The NAACP’s motto is, ‘The Negro shall be free by 1963’– and shall we accept that? We can’t have it, for if we do, it would ruin the economic system of the South. The men of the South are either for our council or against it. There can be no fence straddling.”⁴² Of course, as planters and their allies attempted to build a membership base, others joined to conform to local racist norms and to escape sanctions for deviation. “Many a Southerner,” explained James Graham Cook in his analysis of organized segregationism, “has joined the ‘socially acceptable’ Council in his home town simply as a gesture of half-hearted willingness to drift along with the segregationist mood of the community.”⁴³ Many lawyers, doctors, professors, and journalists thus went along with the current of local public opinion. In other words, exposed neither to disruption nor concession costs, they behaved as conformers. Others with passionate views about their own racial superiority, the perils of integration,

³⁷ McMillen (1971, 79).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁹ Bartley (1969, 314).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 91; McMillen (1971, 61–2).

⁴¹ Bloom (1987, 101).

⁴² Quoted in Vander Zanden (1965, 28).

⁴³ Cook (1964, 117).

and states' rights signed up as well. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine the mobilization of the Council without the backing of the political and economic elite of the plantation regions.

Organizational Activities

With the support of these black belt elites, the Council eschewed violence and instead meted out severe economic and legal reprisals against civil rights activists, supporters, and those whites who expressed less than full-throated support for white supremacy. From the beginning, Council spokesmen asserted their willingness to use black economic dependence upon whites to punish those who transgressed the color line or challenged white supremacist politics. The Citizens' Council in Yazoo City, Mississippi, published in a full-page newspaper advertisement "an authentic list of the purported signers to an NAACP communication to our school board."⁴⁴ Many signers lost their jobs and subsequently asked that their names be removed from the petition. A Council organizer in Dallas County, Alabama, candidly commented: "The white population in this county controls the money, and this is an advantage that the council will use in a fight to legally maintain complete segregation of the races. We intend to make it difficult, if not impossible, for any Negro who advocates desegregation to find and hold a job, get credit or renew a mortgage."⁴⁵ After harsh criticism in the press of this oft-quoted statement, the Council retreated from overt statements regarding the use of economic intimidation and reprisals. Nevertheless, subsequent reports of cases of economic reprisal indicate that this weapon remained in the Council arsenal. Allegations of economic reprisals persisted in Alabama, South Carolina, and Mississippi.⁴⁶

The Council, whose membership included many black belt public officials, pushed for the enactment of a host of new legalistic devices for rolling back the civil rights movement. The Council supported new laws designed to harass civil rights organizations, expose their membership lists, and shut down their legal operations. Further, the Council argued for a myriad of legislative subterfuges and evasions to preserve segregated

⁴⁴ Bolton (2005, 240).

⁴⁵ Quoted in Fleming (1956, 48).

⁴⁶ Various reports in the *New York Times* describe these allegations, for instance April 9, 1955; November 27, 1955; February 13, 1955; July 31, 1956; September 19, 1956; November 14, 1957; September 13, 1958. Between 1954 and 1965, the *New York Times* reported over 80 instances of economic reprisals against individuals, mostly blacks, for support of civil rights activities.

public schools or, if necessary, shut them down and transfer their property, equipment, and funding to private academies. Councilors also advocated the maintenance of a white electorate. With the assistance of state representatives, they sponsored purges of black voters from the registration rolls. Between 1954 and 1959, north Louisiana parishes purged some thirty-one thousand registered African-Americans voters from the rolls.⁴⁷ In plantation counties, black exclusion had long been the pattern. In addition to substantial historical evidence, quantitative research likewise documents a strong association between indicators of labor-intensive agriculture and lower rates of black voter registration.⁴⁸

As the rising tide of civil rights agitation disrupted movement targets, segregationists sought to defend Jim Crow through the imposition of even greater costs for capitulation upon public officials and private citizens. To do this, these movement antagonists, like all benefit-seekers, had various strategic options to affect the behavior of public officials.⁴⁹ They can attempt to shape public opinion to coincide with the organization's goals or activate latent public support by stimulating attentiveness to their cause. They may provide office-seekers with electorally valuable resources. Since obtaining information about constituent preferences can be costly, organizations can collect and communicate this information to office-seekers to encourage their conformity to local preferences. Similarly, organizations provide the electoral resources in the form of voter mobilization and campaign contributions, in addition to information about constituent preferences. Office-seekers weigh these electoral benefits against those provided by the organization's competitors. The greater the organization's capabilities in these strategic channels and the more likely that the organization's central issue will recur, the more formidable the benefit-seeker will be.⁵⁰ To this strategic list should be added the following: benefit-seekers will seek to undercut and outmaneuver their competitors in order to deprive office-seekers of electoral options. As Numan Bartley explains, "The Councils strove to counter political pressure activities of moderate and integrationist groups and to ally support behind segregationist public officials."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Bartley and Graham (1975, 58).

⁴⁸ James (1988). "All of the thirty-one counties in which the early voting rights suits," explains Aiken (1998, 189), "[were] brought by the Civil Rights Division were in the Deep South, and most were nonmetropolitan ones in the plantation regions."

⁴⁹ On these strategic options, see Burstein (1999).

⁵⁰ Hansen (1991).

⁵¹ 1969, 199.

With elite support, Council leaders pursued all of these strategies. In particular, the Councils sought to shape southern public opinion, foster attentiveness among white voters, and punish moderates. As a Council publication declared: "The only reliable prophet for the future is the past, and history proves that the Supreme Power in the government of men has always been Public Sentiment. The Citizens' Council simply provides the machinery for mobilizing, concerting and expressing public opinion."⁵² Across the South, Council speakers fanned out to rally white citizens to the cause. Council organizations produced and distributed vast quantities of anti-integration books and pamphlets extolling the virtues of southern traditions and states' rights, and exposing the sinister Communist machinations behind the movement for integration. In some states these activities included radio and television broadcasts to spread their interpretation of current events. In the early sixties the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission channeled approximately \$200,000 to the state Citizens' Council to promote the organization's campaign to trumpet the virtues of segregated institutions and to combat the alleged anti-southern bias of northern news coverage.⁵³ Many of these activities were aimed expressly at southern audiences to mold public opinion and heighten the white commitment to defense of segregation. As Lubell observed, "What these white-supremacy councils are trying to do is to kill off any hopes of gradual, evolutionary change by hammering Southern opinion into an embattled, unified state of feeling which will brook no compromise."⁵⁴

The Council in particular sought to narrow the range of legitimate political debate about the South's racial situation. "The ways and means whereby moderate voices in the white community could be suppressed," wrote Council historian Neil McMillen, "were among the organization's first concerns."⁵⁵ Councils tolerated no other position than absolute support for Jim Crow, and deviation invited charges of traitorous betrayal of cherished southern values. A Council leader declared at the outset that, in addition to economic reprisals against unruly blacks, deviant whites

⁵² Quoted in Carter (1959, 43).

⁵³ McMillen (1971, 337). Beginning in 1960, the director of the Sovereignty Commission announced the donation of a lump sum of \$20,000 and a monthly contribution of about \$5,000 a month to the Council to support the Council Forum – a radio and television program to broadcast themes of racial reaction.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Cook (1964, 136). On the more general point of movements seeking to shape "the universe of political discourse," see Jensen (1987).

⁵⁵ 1971, 251.

would be subjected to “social and political pressure.”⁵⁶ The Council argued in particular in favor of ostracism for southern moderates, a disastrous prospect for an individual’s business or political prospects. White moderates, including journalists, academics, and ministers, who strayed from or dared to challenge the Council position, were smeared with charges of Communist sympathies, and efforts were made to bring about their ouster.⁵⁷ And, as was often the case, individuals lost their jobs, newspapers lost advertisers, and businesses lost customers.

In *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (1964), James Silver, a historian at the University of Mississippi, describes how the Councilors challenged academic freedom and open discussion. After James Meredith integrated the University of Mississippi in 1962, the Council demanded that university faculty members either take an oath to support segregation or leave the university.⁵⁸ Faculty members who offered anything less than a wholehearted endorsement of segregation were singled out for a postcard campaign sent to the university authorities demanding that specific professors “and all other integrationists be removed immediately from the pay roll of Ole Miss.”⁵⁹ The Council also instigated a challenge to the university’s accreditation and threatened to seek the closure of the newly integrated university. Taking the defense of segregation into the classrooms involved as well a review of textbooks and library materials. Erle Johnston, the director of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission and a self-described “practical segregationist,” declared in retrospect that “the Citizens Council was just stirring up hate *among whites*.”⁶⁰

Along with keeping southern white opinion in line, the Council actively participated in electoral politics and threatened white politicians with the tag of weakness on segregation. As Cook pointed out at the time, the Councils “screen, endorse, support, oppose and denounce candidates and public officials . . . to preserve segregation.”⁶¹ As suggested above, information is assumed to be costly for both voters and office-seekers. For voters, it is costly to learn about the actions of public officials, and public officials need accurate information about the priorities of actual

⁵⁶ The speaker was former Mississippi state senator Fred Jones, quoted in Fleming (1956, 48).

⁵⁷ Routh and Anthony (1957, 55).

⁵⁸ McMillen (1971, 246).

⁵⁹ Quoted in McMillen (1971, 247).

⁶⁰ Emphasis added. Available at: <http://www.usm.edu/crdp/html/cd/citizens.htm> (accessed March 15, 2006).

⁶¹ 1964, 137.

or prospective majorities.⁶² Benefit-seekers often attempt to reduce the information costs for voters so that political targets will conform to mass preferences, as well as provide office-seekers with information about constituent interests. The Council provided both types of information. To make certain that candidates espoused the “right” position on segregation – unbending resistance even if this meant closing the public schools – the Council in several cases sent out political questionnaires to candidates for public office. These questionnaires were meant to encourage them to profess their heartfelt devotion to segregation or risk denunciation.⁶³ Their effectiveness is unclear. Yet, in Alabama, the incumbent Governor James Folsom and allies were devastated in the 1958 election after they had not completed the questionnaires, whereas their opponents had affirmed their commitment to massive resistance in theirs. In that election, fervent segregationist challengers had derided Folsom and his associates as weak on the race issue. Fear of electoral reprisals doubtless impelled many legislators to adhere to the Council’s orthodoxy, despite their own misgivings. As a Mississippi legislator explained, when the “hot eyes of Bill Simmons [the head of the state Council] were watching,” he would vote in favor of a bill that “didn’t make sense.”⁶⁴ Regarding a bill to allow cities and counties to donate to the Council, another Mississippi legislator stated, “When the bill came up in the House . . . I thought it was unconstitutional. But I voted for it because if I had voted against the Councils, Bill Simmons would brand me as an integrationist.”⁶⁵ In the states and localities of greater Council strength, the organization threatened to behave as an instigator capable of elevating voter attentiveness to punish wayward lawmakers for deviating from the Council’s preferred position.

With elected officials in need of information about constituent preferences and their intensity, the Council eagerly obliged. In New Orleans, after fewer than two hundred moderates had signed a petition in favor of open schools and compliance with *Brown*, the local Council circulated a counterpetition that, in two weeks, attracted “almost 15,000 signatures demanding a continuation of segregation.”⁶⁶ In Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, Council affiliates surveyed white residents

⁶² Arnold (1990); Hansen (1991).

⁶³ McMillen (1971, 306–8).

⁶⁴ Silver (1964, 42).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Bartley (1969, 199).

to determine their views on segregation and conveyed their findings (of virtually unanimous support) to elected officials. The electoral activities of the Council discouraged office-seekers, irrespective of their own views about the best responses to the *Brown* decision and the broader civil rights challenge, from deviating from intransigence. As Bartley explains, they “hoped to make the politicians dependent on the Councils.”⁶⁷ So long as the Council had the capacity to punish moderate lawmakers or until other organizations were emboldened to mobilize against the Council, the political incentives were decisively weighted in favor of defiance.

Insofar as most southern whites believed in segregation and suffered no harm from civil rights protests, Councilors generally assumed that there would be adherence to local racial customs. However, for those business interests hit with protests that interfered with their normal operations (see Chapter 3), the Council applied threats of social ostracism and economic reprisals to discourage white defections. Roy Harris, president of the Citizens’ Councils of America, called for “a boycott of merchants who fail to join and actively support racial segregation.”⁶⁸ As with political actors, these prospective costs were more serious in those places with greater Council support. In the months immediately after the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a Council boycott put out of business a movie theater that had integrated in Greenwood, a town in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. Similarly, the Jackson Citizens’ Council threatened white businesses with boycotts if they complied with the new law. “Businessmen,” cautioned the Jackson Citizens’ Council, “cannot play both sides of the street; they must ultimately choose whether to serve white or Negro customers.”⁶⁹ However, outside their black belt strongholds, the threat proved empty. Indeed, despite numerous reports of economic retaliation against insurgent blacks and the occasional white liberal, there are surprisingly few accounts of the same tactics being used by the Council against white businesses in cities outside the black belt. The Council’s inability to impose severe concession costs in such cases reveals a fundamental weakness in their defense of Jim Crow – a defect that the civil rights movement effectively exploited. Further, in the states of the Peripheral South, such as Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, the Council or

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Note 36.

⁶⁸ Southern Regional Council, “Intimidation, Reprisal, and Violence in the South’s Racial Crisis” (1960, 9). The Council encouraged merchants to post Council membership stickers in their store windows to demonstrate their fealty to the organization.

⁶⁹ Quoted in McMillen (1971, 262).

analogous organizations were generally unable to extract policy concessions from lawmakers. Yet within their organizational strongholds, the Council effectively wielded the threat of economic, political, and social reprisals against movement targets and others who might dare articulate support for anything less than absolute fealty to white supremacy.

Resource Competition and the White Countermobilization

Along with mobilization among black belt elites, the civil rights movement threatened other whites with significant concession costs. Specifically, the color line furnished lower-income and less-educated whites with advantages in various spheres, including the labor market. Those at the bottom rungs of the southern socioeconomic hierarchy derived advantages due to the confinement of blacks to more menial occupational sectors and the privileging of whites in others. This view appears in Gunnar Myrdal's classic *An American Dilemma* in which he observes that lower-class whites "feel actual economic competition or fear of potential competition from the Negroes. They need the caste line for much more substantial reasons than do the middle and upper classes."⁷⁰ Bonacich (1972), Cummings (1980), and Olzak and Nagel (1986) likewise posit a theory of ethnic antagonism based on racially split labor markets in which African-Americans threatened the relatively advantaged position of certain blue-collar whites.⁷¹ This competition perspective is consistent with countless other studies on racial identity, attitudes, and politics.⁷² Popular news accounts of the period present similar analyses. Describing

⁷⁰ 1944, 199. See also Blalock (1967); Blumer (1958); Bobo (1983); Bobo and Hutchings (1996). This general perspective is referred to variously as a competition theory, group competition theory, or realistic group conflict theory, but, in important ways, the main assumptions are the same.

⁷¹ Based on occupational differences, Cummings (1980) distinguishes whites based on their vulnerability to competition with African-Americans for jobs. He finds that those exposed to greater economic competition generally hold more racially intolerant attitudes. At times, research has collapsed the distinction between the black belt hypothesis, which often rests on elite opposition to civil rights, and competition theory under the rubric of a general "group threat" explanation; see Giles (1975). Group threat approaches presume that ethnic or racial animus rises with the relative size of a minority population and thereby blurs the main instigators of interracial strife. Despite some overlapping hypotheses, I suggest that the black belt and competition approaches generate distinct propositions and should be distinguished.

⁷² Bobo (1983); Glaser (1994); Huckfeldt and Kohfeldt (1989). The long history of working-class white mobilization in Birmingham, Alabama, for protection against competition with blacks in the labor market is richly described in McKiven (1995). Nor is this competition confined to the South. Man (1951) offers a labor competition explanation for the New York draft riots of 1963.

the racial strife in Birmingham, for instance, *Time* magazine observed that local whites “view desegregation less as an abstract threat to be fended off by lawyers than as a specific, bread-and-butter threat to jobs, promotions, and family security.”⁷³ Likewise, as the editor of the *McComb Enterprise-Journal* explained, “A large part of the conflict in the area of race is economic.”⁷⁴

Although historical studies of reactionary movements have often pointed to status anxieties, more recent research treats countermobilization as an instrumental response to the intensification of competition over resources.⁷⁵ Again, economic competition drives variation in ethnic mobilization and conflict. Supplemental to these economic advantages, Roediger (1999) suggests that marginal whites gained other social and psychological “wages” associated with their whiteness. Not coincidentally, in opinion surveys, whites in more vulnerable occupations and those with less education often harbored the most negative views of African-Americans and hostile attitudes toward integration.⁷⁶ Finally, the working-class neighborhoods often had less residential segregation and therefore found the prospect of school desegregation relatively more threatening (or were selected by local school boards for desegregation before middle- or upper-income districts). This exposure to the concession costs associated with the egalitarian thrust of the civil rights movement fostered opposition among vulnerable whites and stimulated reactive countermobilization.

Coupled with their greater exposure to concession costs, these threatened lower-income whites had weak incentives to bargain or compromise with movement activists due to a corresponding insulation from disruption costs. They were not generally vulnerable to civil rights disruptions,

⁷³ December 15, 1958; quoted in Eskew (1997).

⁷⁴ Oliver Emmerich, *McComb Enterprise Journal*, October 23, 1964.

⁷⁵ McVeigh (1999); Olzak (1992). In addition to economic competition, civil rights gains threatened lower-class whites with additional specific concession costs as well. In Little Rock and New Orleans, the public schools attended by the children of these whites were singled out for integration while segregation was allowed to continue in schools of upper-income families. In both cases, large crowds formed to resist integration. In sum, multiple sources support the contention that certain lower-income whites favored defending their relatively advantaged position under Jim Crow. On reactionary militia mobilization during the 1990s as a response to structural social changes, see Van Dyke and Soule (2002).

⁷⁶ Sheatsley (1966). Those employed in unskilled, semi-skilled, and skilled occupations reported far less racial liberalism than other categories such as professionals.

particularly because the principal targets of civil rights protests were public officials and the operators of downtown retail establishments. Mostly, the impact of civil rights protests would have been felt as an inconvenience as crowds of onlookers and police interfered with shopping in the downtown center. Damage to a locality's reputation in the national media or the indefinite losses in external investment too seem unlikely to have been felt as a significant cost. A local business slowdown due to reduced economic activity might have taken months to be felt by working-class whites. Thus, in general, these whites were shielded from movement disruption costs but vulnerable to those associated with certain tangible, immediate civil rights gains. These marginal whites, then, might be deemed conformers insofar as they dealt only with concession costs in the abstract, but as resisters if they were confronted by prospective losses from immediate concessions to movement demands.⁷⁷

The threat of heightened racial competition and insulation from disruption costs encouraged certain lower socioeconomic status whites to support the most vehement segregationists for elective office. In their careful analysis of voting behavior, Bartley and Graham (1975) found strong support for militant segregationists in working-class precincts during the heyday of the civil rights movement. In the 1960 Democratic gubernatorial primary election in North Carolina, for instance, the fierce segregationist I. Beverly Lake attracted 44 percent of the runoff vote, despite the opposition of most Democratic party regulars. In that election, he swept the rural black belt section and attracted considerable support among lower-income whites.⁷⁸ Although lower-income whites previously supported populist reformers and New Dealers, the sudden entrance of race into southern politics drew this element of the electorate into alliance with their traditional opponents – black belt elites. “Voting patterns varied, of course, but in state after state the populist–New Deal alignments of the early postwar years broke apart, as rural and low-income whites shifted from support of economic reform to defense of social conservatism.”⁷⁹ This pattern nevertheless coincides with the expectation that those whites with the most to lose from civil rights gains formed a bulwark of political support for segregation. Of these whites, some went beyond voting

⁷⁷ Soule and Van Dyke (1999) find support for competition theory in their analysis of black church burnings, which were widely reported in the 1990s.

⁷⁸ Bartley and Graham (1975, 76).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

for militant segregationists and random scuffles with civil rights demonstrators to enter the ranks of the most infamous foe of the civil rights movement – the Ku Klux Klan.

The Ku Klux Klan

The Klan that emerged after the *Brown* decision was actually the third incarnation of that organization.⁸⁰ Unlike the prior waves of mobilization during Reconstruction and then again in the 1920s, the Klan that arose to oppose the civil rights movement was far smaller, divided into multiple organizational units with diverse and competing leaders, and perhaps more importantly, it lacked respectability or elite endorsement. Nevertheless, along with Council mobilization, the various Klans gained new recruits after the *Brown* decision. Eldon Edwards, an Atlanta autoworker, organized a new ensemble of “klaverns” under the aegis of U.S. Klans, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc. In a founding ceremony in 1956, this new organization drew a crowd of more than three thousand from across the South to Stone Mountain, Georgia, which had been the birthplace of the Second Klan. A 1958 survey by the Anti-Defamation League placed the membership of Edwards’s U.S. Klans between twelve and fifteen thousand; the North Carolina Klan between two and five thousand; and estimated that another fifteen hundred belonged to the seven other Klan organizations.⁸¹ By the end of the decade these organizations had weakened, but the acceleration of civil rights protests in the 1960s stimulated further Klan countermobilization. By the 1960s the United Klans of America (UKA), headed by Robert Shelton, became the largest of the Klan organizations. Headquartered in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the UKA had an estimated membership between twenty-six and thirty-three thousand. The UKA had numerous affiliates in other southern states with the strongest branch located in North Carolina, where more than half the total membership resided. Overall, the Klan was not a mass organization; across the South, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Virginia were the only states with local memberships in excess of one thousand.⁸² The many Klan leaders and organizations competed for membership and never offered a unified defense of white supremacy. By 1967, after stepped

⁸⁰ Some commentators, counting the resurgence in the immediate postwar period, might argue that the Klan of the 1960s was the fourth incarnation.

⁸¹ Given the organization’s secretiveness, studies of the Klan suffer from many uncertainties regarding total membership over time. Researchers commonly rely upon data from the Anti-Defamation League.

⁸² Aiken (1998, 176).

up federal and state repression had been used to check the organizations, the estimated membership had fallen below seventeen thousand. While these figures suggest an organization capable of doing significant harm, they do not depict an organization composed of more than a small minority of southern whites.⁸³ Several other smaller organizations, lacking the Klan appellation, were essentially variants of the same organizational type, such as Americans for the Preservation of the White Race (APWR).

Whereas the Citizens' Council represented the elites of the plantation regions, the various factions of the Klan served as the principal segregationist organizations for the white lower and lower-middle classes of the cities and towns. Both the patterns of participation in the KKK and ostensible motivations in this organization coincide with the predictions of competition theory. Virtually every journalistic account describes the Klan leadership and rank-and-file membership as less educated and economically marginal. Based on a limited sample of 153 Klan members and leaders (of unknown representativeness), Vander Zanden found a mix of skilled and semi-skilled workers as well as marginal white-collar workers (store clerks, service station attendants, etc.).⁸⁴ Bartley suggests that the Klan's membership "was drawn almost exclusively from the lower socioeconomic groups in Southern society."⁸⁵ A "former officer of the United Klans of America described the 'rank and file members' as persons 'drawn from uneducated elements of the population who never attained the social status they would [have liked] to achieve.'⁸⁶ Whereas

⁸³ In accounting for the weakness of southern countermobilization, Chappell (2004) provides a somewhat different explanation. He argues that, unlike the civil rights movement, southern religious figures and institutions refused to provide a compelling moral defense of the segregated South. Without this philosophical and infrastructural foundation upon which to construct an effective countermovement, organized opposition was inherently weak. Since countless studies document the centrality of the black church to the civil rights struggle (see McAdam [1982]; Morris [1984]), the unwillingness of white churches to operate as a counterweight certainly seems relevant. The lack of this preexisting set of social ties and organizational infrastructure denied the white backlash an essential mobilizing structure and no doubt hindered collective action. From the perspective presented here, in addition to a cultural aversion to expounding a religious argument for white supremacy, the southern white clergy could behave as conformers in large measure because civil rights demands were threatening to neither their fundamental interests nor those of their congregants. It is suggestive that, in the antebellum period, when there was a more direct threat to a larger share of their parishioners, these institutions were capable of finding a moral justification for racial subordination. Ultimately, antislavery activism produced sectional rifts in the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian dominations.

⁸⁴ 1965, 43.

⁸⁵ 1969, 204.

⁸⁶ Aiken (1998, 177).

the Citizens' Councils were strongest in small towns of the black belt, it is telling that those found in urban, non-black belt settings relied on rhetoric much like the Klan's and were "usually composed of individuals from lower and lower-middle class stations." The North Alabama Citizens' Council, for example, drew support from "the industrial suburbs of Birmingham . . . [and the membership] was comprised almost entirely of laborers, many of whom were union men."⁸⁷ Recent research based on a representative sample of Alabama Klansmen (in 1963–64) confirms the portrait of Klan membership as drawing heavily from lower-income whites.⁸⁸

While the threat to the political economy of plantation agriculture actuated black belt elites, racial egalitarianism provoked certain marginal whites in the Klan to defend the competitive advantages that they derived from their skin color. Although fierce racism, preexisting social ties to Klan members, and permissive state authorities no doubt facilitated the entrance of certain whites into the hooded order, multiple accounts of working-class hostility to racial equality and countermobilization corroborate the competition explanation. For example, a civil rights activist in Natchez, Mississippi, noted that "the whites there feel definitely threatened by Negro labor (terrorism and brutality are believed to be the work of white industrial workers in the area)."⁸⁹ Regarding membership of the Klan and the motivations of members, Cook writes:

The Ku Klux Klan . . . is made up mainly of people of low income – people who cannot afford to send their children to private segregated schools, who cannot afford to flee to racially pure suburbs to escape Negro neighbors, and whose jobs might seem to them to be most immediately threatened by the institution of "fair-employment" laws.⁹⁰

In his analysis of Birmingham, Alabama, Eskew (1997) argues that the civil rights movement "threatened white jobs and family security" and that "massive resistance protected white workers during the transition into a service-consumer economy." Fairclough, in his exhaustive investigation of the civil rights movement in Louisiana, sketches how resource competition shaped racial contention in the Klan-ridden town of Bogalusa. "The Bogalusa crisis . . . exposed the economic dimension of the racial conflict: the struggle for desegregation was fought against the

⁸⁷ McMillen (1971, 47).

⁸⁸ Cunningham (2007A).

⁸⁹ Sutherland (1965, 67).

⁹⁰ 1962, 118.

backdrop of the giant Crown-Zellerbach plant, where black and white workers competed for a shrinking number of jobs and promotions.”⁹¹ In Bogalusa, Fairclough demonstrates, the civil rights struggle was cast as a direct challenge to white economic privileges.⁹² Northrup and Rowan (1970) found in their investigation of southern pulp and paper mills that “Negro jobs and Negro employment were especially hard hit in the South, but this first heavy taste of job insecurity since World War II [in the early 1960s] tended to harden opposition of white workers to improved job opportunities for Negroes, while at the same time strengthening the demands of Negroes for a change in the racial-occupational pattern.”⁹³ In Laurel, Mississippi, Klansmen kidnapped and flogged a leader in a Mississippi woodworkers’ union because “the union had approved a Federal order giving Negroes equal treatment in the Masonite plant.”⁹⁴ Comparing data on the occupations of Alabama Klansmen with the larger local population, Cunningham (2007A) found additional support for the competition explanation of reactive countermobilization. Specifically, he found that, whereas whites in higher-skill and professional sectors exposed to less competition from nonwhite workers were significantly underrepresented in the Klan, whites in sectors with higher proportions of African-American workers were overrepresented. Cunningham concludes that the evidence “support[s] the view that the Klan’s appeal was strong within sectors where workers’ status would be most vulnerable to looming changes posed by desegregation policies.”⁹⁵ Thus, as indicated above, a growing body of research finds reactive mobilization to be an instrumental response to heightened resource competition.⁹⁶

Organizational Activities

To protect their advantaged position within the Jim Crow racial order, whites in the many Klan units and comparable supremacist organizations engaged in various actions to heighten the concession costs for movement targets and frighten civil rights sympathizers. Rallies were

⁹¹ Fairclough (1995, 346).

⁹² Labor organizations, feeble though they were in the South, typically reinforced the color line to protect the advantaged position of white workers. Although national and some local union leaders affirmed their commitment to biracial labor organizations, rank-and-file whites resisted these moves time and again.

⁹³ Northrup and Rowan (1970, 55).

⁹⁴ Forster and Epstein (1965, 26).

⁹⁵ 2007A, 303.

⁹⁶ See also Beck (2000).

widespread and, despite the relatively small formal membership, it was not uncommon for these to attract more than a thousand spectators.⁹⁷ Klan orators regaled listeners with stories of the grave dangers of Communism and “race mixing,” and they called on the white “Anglo-Saxon South” to defend Christianity, white womanhood, and “the Southern way of life.” These events culminated in a parade of uniformed Klansmen setting aflame a large wooden cross. Despite the absence of open calls for violence, contemporary observers regarded these occasions not only as recruitment devices but as a means to intimidate conciliatory whites, local politicians, and civil rights activists.

Aware of the organization’s unpopularity among white southerners, the Klan purported to be a conventional political organization with the purpose of swaying the behavior of movement targets. They argued for registering more whites to vote to overwhelm any increase in black voter registration and maintain the political rewards tilted toward strict segregation. Like the Citizens’ Council, the Klan and comparable organizations staged counterprotests and pickets of stores, restaurants, theaters, and other public facilities that had desegregated. As sit-ins began in Atlanta in late 1960, nearly one hundred Klansmen in Atlanta counterpicketed those department stores that were the target of civil rights activities.⁹⁸ They urged whites “not to patronize firms that desegregate, but buy from those that don’t.”⁹⁹ Segregationist countermobilization indeed fostered concerns among business interests that they might suffer from concessions. The *Atlanta Constitution* summed up the worries of many members of the business community: “Even the most moderate is likely to contemplate desegregation with real uneasiness. The fears, sound or baseless, of segregationist reprisal and economic failure run strong.”¹⁰⁰ In Charleston, as the merchants brokered an agreement with demonstrators to integrate, five men from the National Association for the Preservation of the White Race circulated a flyer reading: “Attention. If you are in favor of preserving our way of life won’t you please boycott any store who favor integration. Thank you.” Segregationists in Savannah likewise began a boycott against stores that had desegregated.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Bartley (1969, 20).

⁹⁸ *New York Times*, November 7, 1960.

⁹⁹ *New York Times*, August 11, 1963.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Tuck (2001, 136).

¹⁰¹ *New York Times*, July 11, 1961.

Yet, unlike the elite backers of the Council movement, Klansmen had relatively fewer options at their disposal to deter insurgent blacks, and to intimidate white supporters and those willing to capitulate to movement demands. Along with public rallies and occasional picketing, the Klan therefore resurrected the historical use of harassment, violence, and fear. The SRC reported: “Gunpowder and dynamite, parades and cross burnings, anonymous telephone calls, beatings, and threats have been the marks of their trade. These attacks have been directed not only at Negroes, but at some white persons who have strayed from local customs.”¹⁰² In an extensive report of four years of southern resistance immediately after *Brown*, the SRC tabulated some 530 instances of “intimidation, reprisal, and violence” against African-American civil rights advocates and white moderates. Although all of these events cannot necessarily be attributed to the Klan, the statistics of the lengthy summary section on violence are striking:

6 Negroes killed; 29 individuals, 11 of them white, shot and wounded in racial incidents; 44 persons beaten; 5 stabbed; 30 homes bombed; in one instance (at Clinton, Tenn.) an additional 30 houses were damaged by a single blast; attempted blasting of five other homes; 8 homes burned; 15 struck by gunfire, and 7 homes stoned; 4 schools bombed, in Jacksonville, Nashville, and Chattanooga, and Clinton, Tenn.; 2 bombing attempts on schools, in Charlotte and Clinton; 7 churches bombed, one of which was for whites; an attempt made to bomb another Negro church; 1 church in Memphis burned; another church stoned; 4 Jewish temples or centers bombed, in Miami, Nashville, Jacksonville, and Atlanta; and 3 bombing attempts on Jewish buildings, in Gastonia, N.C., Birmingham, and Charlotte.¹⁰³

The SRC acknowledges that the tally, drawn from press reports, is doubtless incomplete. Further, the more notorious events, particularly those that appeared in the media, had broader significance in that they signaled to others the risks of supporting racial change.

Already fierce, intimidation and violent resistance against civil rights advocates grew stronger as the sit-in movement gathered momentum. According to an Anti-Defamation League report, in March 1960, “more than a thousand crosses were burned in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas and other southern states [as a] show of strength by the then newly formed National Knights of the KKK.”¹⁰⁴ Although the Klan

¹⁰² Southern Regional Council, “Intimidation, Reprisal, and Violence in the South’s Racial Crisis” (1960).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Forster and Epstein (1965, 26).

leadership insisted that the organization was nonviolent, it was presumed to have conducted numerous terrorist incidents.¹⁰⁵ Using arson and bombings, the Klan sought to silence civil rights activists, frighten white moderates, and foster a climate of fear in which few wished to question the racial order. During a CORE-sponsored Freedom Ride in 1961, in which participants rode on interstate buses into the South to test federal willingness to enforce a Supreme Court ruling banning segregation in interstate transportation facilities, riders sometimes met with severe violence. In Birmingham, local law enforcement allowed Klansmen fifteen minutes in which to assault riders with baseball bats, chains, and metal pipes. At times, Klansmen resorted to murder, including the notorious killing of four girls in the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham as well as the slayings of Lemuel Penn, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, Viola Liuzzo, and Vernon Dahmer.¹⁰⁶ Although Klan responsibility for these events was sometimes uncertain, a tally of incidents against civil rights activists from the annual *New York Times Index* from 1954 to 1965 includes over fifteen hundred events instigated by white citizens. Among them were over three hundred incidents of harassment, one hundred bombings and arsons, over one hundred racial clashes, and in excess of five hundred acts

¹⁰⁵ Schaefer (1971, 55).

¹⁰⁶ I briefly summarize these episodes here for readers unfamiliar with them. After the climax of the Birmingham campaign in 1963, Klansmen bombed the local movement headquarters at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Four girls, Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley, died in the blast as they prepared for Sunday school. Next, traveling through Georgia as he returned home to Washington, D.C., Lemuel Penn, a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve and a decorated World War II veteran, died after local Klansmen fired into his automobile. Acting nine days after President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the murderers evidently believed, due to his license plates, that Penn was affiliated with the Johnson administration. Also in 1964, at the outset of the Freedom Summer, Mississippi Klansmen, including members of the local police, abducted three civil rights workers, murdered them, and buried their bodies in an earthen dam. Unlike previous murders in which African-Americans were the victims, this case attracted national attention because two of the victims (Goodman and Schwerner) were white. President Johnson pushed the FBI to pursue an extensive search for the civil rights workers. During this massive search operation, the bodies of two missing African-Americans (Henry Dee and Charles Moore) were also found. Liuzzo, a civil rights supporter from Michigan who had traveled to Alabama for the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march, died after Klansmen fired into her car while she was returning demonstrators to their homes. In 1966 Klansmen firebombed the home of Vernon Dahmer, a local NAACP leader in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Although his family escaped the flames, Dahmer suffered fatal burns as he returned gunfire coming into his house.

of violence.¹⁰⁷ These actions resulted in more than one thousand injuries and at least twenty-nine murders.¹⁰⁸ Again, countless other incidents of harassment and threats were likely never reported.

For some whites willing to concede to movement demands, attempted violence and actual assaults no doubt affected the perceptions about the cost of doing so. Various examples demonstrate this point. For instance, two school board members in Baton Rouge who had opposed the governor's school board "packing" measure to resist integration had nighttime visits at their homes from hooded figures who left notes simply stating, "No integration – KKK," and a third received death threats over the telephone.¹⁰⁹ In St. Augustine, after a protracted struggle and the reaching of an agreement to integrate certain public accommodations, picketers carried inflammatory signs outside the newly integrated facilities. An exasperated businessman declared: "We have been caught in a dilemma . . . we are forced to serve Negroes although it hurts our business. If we serve them, then white pickets run the rest of the business away."¹¹⁰ Threatening phone calls began for the operators of integrated restaurants and motels. Then, after arson damaged the motel restaurant of a racial moderate, the businesses that had integrated reversed themselves. Similarly, in Bogalusa, Louisiana, following the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, six whites invited Brook Hays, a former congressman and racial moderate, to speak about the challenges of integration. Immediately, the Klan began a terrorist campaign against the six, in particular, Ralph Blumberg, the operator and co-owner of a local radio station. Callers harassed them constantly with threats of violence. "He's signed his death warrant," declared an anonymous caller to Blumberg's wife.¹¹¹ Station sponsors were intimidated until most canceled their commercials. In a leaflet distributed around the town, whites were warned against attending the prospective meeting with Hays. "Those who do attend . . . will be tagged an integrationist and will be dealt with accordingly by the Knights of Ku Klux Klan." Despite the cancellation of the meeting, Blumberg editorialized on the radio about freedom of speech

¹⁰⁷ Data collected by the author.

¹⁰⁸ These figures do not include incidents of ostensibly racially motivated violence but with no apparent connection to the civil rights movement. Maya Lin's civil rights southern memorial includes the names of forty fatalities of the civil rights struggle.

¹⁰⁹ *New York Times*, February 25, 1961

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Colburn (1982, 229).

¹¹¹ Forster and Epstein (1965, 28).

and respect for law. The threats and harassment continued unabated. His car windows were smashed, his tires flattened, and shots were fired at the station's transmitter. Eventually, Blumberg went out of the business and moved his family out of the state.

A similar fate befell Albert W. "Red" Heffner, Jr., of McComb, Mississippi. Though he was a respected and popular member of the community, everything changed after Heffner invited two civil rights workers to his house for dinner in 1964 to discuss how to reduce community tensions stemming from an ongoing voter registration drive. After months of continuous harassment, threats, ostracism, reprisals against his business, and the mysterious death of the family dog, Heffner and his family left the state.¹¹² As Bartley suggests regarding the Klan, the "everpresent threat of physical retribution was a significant factor in encouraging those who would dissent to hold their peace."¹¹³ Even in the absence of great numbers, anonymous intimidation and threats of violence might substantially affect target perceptions of the costs of conceding to movement demands.

In politics, the Klan was less formidable. Except in Alabama, the Klan lacked political clout to shape the electoral calculations of office-seekers. In Alabama politics, the Klan pushed for more aggressive policies to defend segregation. Gubernatorial candidate John Patterson openly sought support from the Council and leaders of the Klan in the 1958 election and made his commitment to segregation the centerpiece of his campaign. With his successful election into the governor's office, Patterson met with Council leaders and state policy tilted toward massive resistance to the implementation of *Brown*. In the same election, George Wallace had resisted courting the Klan's support but, stung by his defeat, promised never to be outdone in racist appeals and sought Klan backing in

¹¹² These events are recounted in newspaper stories, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Papers, and secondary sources. See Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission Papers (MSSCP) online, Folder Red Heffner, SCR ID # 2-36-2-37-1-3-2 (accessed July 11, 2008). See also Dittmer (1994). The Klan and similar organizations, such as Americans for the Preservation of the White Race, engaged in other operations that targeted local businesses. At times, a business owner might be notified by these organizations that certain African-American employees were "trouble-makers" and must be fired. If they refused to comply, trouble began. After a merchant in Liberty, Mississippi, refused to terminate a long-time employee, "within 24 hours a strangling boycott had been set up against his business." After a few weeks, the abandonment of his white customers left his business in a shambles and he capitulated to the organization's demands. Kenneth Tolliver, "New Racist Organization Terrorizes Several South Mississippi Counties," *Delta Democrat-Times*, undated, MSSCP, SCR ID # 6-36-0-19-1-1-1 (accessed July 11, 2008).

¹¹³ 1969, 201.

his successful 1962 bid for the governorship. His inaugural vow of “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever,” foreshadowed Wallace’s own fervent defense of Jim Crow throughout his administration. However, beyond Alabama and a few scattered localities, the Klan’s numbers were too few to offer credible threats of electoral reprisal.

Overall, the general pattern of Klan mobilization coincides with the vulnerabilities of certain whites to the concession costs associated with civil rights gains. The various Klans engaged in a wide range of tactics to oppose the civil rights movement and others in favor of racial moderation. These included conventional rallies and political mobilization, but shaded into more sinister acts meant to intimidate, injure, and sometimes kill movement supporters. As movement targets and others contemplated how to respond to civil rights agitation, Klan threats and picketing no doubt discouraged many from deviating from southern racial norms. Irrespective of the preferences of movement targets toward civil rights, fear of organized reprisals and violence discouraged capitulation and fostered instead hesitation and vacillation. Further, Klan intimidation and violence against civil rights activists and supporters might have deterred participation and threatened local movements with collapse. Yet, the willingness of participants in the civil rights movement to brave these fears and to continue their struggle deprived vulnerable targets of the option of indefinite delay.

Council and Klan Mobilization in the 1960s

The divergent life histories of the Citizens’ Councils and the Klan further suggests that exposure to concession costs affects the intensity of reactive countermobilization. Although the Citizens’ Council mobilized in the immediate wake of the *Brown* decision, it limped into the 1960s, despite the eruption of provocative direct-action civil rights protests across the South. This is all the more surprising because contemporaneous observers in the late fifties pointed out that Council membership generally surged amid challenges upon Jim Crow. Yet, rather than experiencing an organizational resurgence, the Council movement peaked in 1957 and declined steadily thereafter.¹¹⁴ The attempted revitalization of the moribund Citizens’ Council in response to the escalation of civil rights agitation failed miserably, even though the apparent threat to the southern racial order was greater than ever before. By contrast, the escalation of civil rights

¹¹⁴ McMillen (1971, 152).

protests triggered Klan countermobilization with the membership rising steadily into the middle 1960s. Writing in the mid-sixties, Forster and Epstein declared, "Today, the Klans have replaced the Councils as the symbol and instruments of last-ditch resistance."¹¹⁵

While various explanations might be offered for this pattern, such as the Council's failure to halt token integration in the decisive challenges with federal authorities or growing urban elite unease with the Council's extremist policies, some measure of the Council's weakness in the 1960s appears attributable to declining concession costs among plantation interests. Throughout most of the plantation South, the astonishing pace of mechanization of the cotton harvest substantially reduced dependence upon black farm labor and produced a corresponding diminution of the economic threat from civil rights gains. In the year of the *Brown* decision, nearly 90 percent of the Mississippi cotton harvest was still picked by hand, but, by 1965, in the cradle of organized countermobilization, the figure had fallen to less than 25 percent.¹¹⁶ Thus, despite the escalation of civil rights agitation, it was insufficient to inspire renewed elite countermobilization, even within much of the plantation belt.¹¹⁷ At the same time that mechanization was weakening the resolve of plantation interests to defend Jim Crow, the threat of economic competition had not abated for vulnerable working-class whites. Accordingly, as elite countermobilization dwindled, segregationist organizations were resurgent in numerous communities across the South as these vulnerable working-class whites joined them to keep blacks "in their place." Thus, what might appear to be a puzzling divergence in the organizational histories of the two principal segregationist organizations can be traced in some measure to changes in the costs associated with movement success.

Summary

This chapter addresses three general propositions. First, the responses of third parties are patterned and based on the same logic that shapes target responses. As most third parties suffer neither from movement disruptions nor the cost of a target's capitulation, they are expected to behave

¹¹⁵ Forster and Epstein (1965, 7).

¹¹⁶ Wright (1986, 244). Aiken (1998, 26) reports that "the percentage of cotton harvested by machines [in the Yazoo Delta] jumped from 69% in 1964 to 95 in 1966."

¹¹⁷ On the declining elite concern over the agricultural labor supply in this period, see Greenberg (1980); Wright (1986).

as conformers in which they take no action and adhere to dominant local customs. By contrast, third parties that intervene in movement-target interactions will be disproportionately interests shielded from movement disruptions but vulnerable to the costs of movement victory. Next, multiple studies of southern racial history and politics document this cost configuration. To delineate these specific concession costs, I have relied mainly upon two approaches applicable to southern race relations: the black belt hypothesis and competition theory. These perspectives clarify the specific patterns of white countermobilization among black belt elites and marginal whites. Thus, members of both the Citizens' Council and the Klan represented elements of the white populations most vulnerable to civil rights gains and relatively insulated from the costs of movement disruptions. Circumstantial evidence appears in the divergent life histories of the Council and the Klan. Finally, countermobilization by third parties affects how movement targets and others respond to movement demands; in particular how they calculate the costs of capitulation. Surveying the activities of black belt officials, Councilors, and Klansmen, it is clear that countermovements do more than simply lash out at movement activists and supporters. Rather, they seek to deter targets from capitulating as well as discourage supportive intervention from other third parties. The intensity of countermobilization conditions a movement's likelihood of success. Greater countermobilization diminishes a movement's prospects for extracting concessions from targets as the magnification of concession costs pushes targets toward either vacillation or resistance. Conversely, weak or absent organized opposition furnishes targets with greater latitude in defining their optimal response to movement demands, and improves the likelihood of movement success. Together, these propositions highlight the fundamental point that any explanation for movement outcomes must incorporate an account of the actions of antagonistic third parties, a point elucidated further in the case studies found in Chapter 4.